

THE GOLDEN AMAZON'S Triumph



NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED
IN BOOK OR OTHER FORM

By John
Russell Fearn

CHRIS WILSON, formerly chief of staff of United Airlines and now controller of the Dood Space Line, tried not to show any undue excitement as the big man in the satellite-collared overcoat was shown in to his London office. He found it a hard task. When your visitor can make or mar a mighty project it is not easy to appear calm.

"Mr. Wilson?"

Chris Wilson got up and hurried round the desk.

"Glad to know you, Mr. Emerson!" Chris shook the extended flabby hand warmly. "Have a seat."

"Thanks." Biffie Emerson moved ponderously to a chair and took a cigar from the ivory box proffered him.

Then Chris returned to his position behind the desk and waited. It was sound policy now to keep quiet and allow Biffie Emerson, perhaps the wealthiest and most powerful industrialist in the world of 1970, to have his head.

Emerson got his cigar going and turned his building face to look at Chris Wilson across the desk.

"I've been a long time coming to this, Mr. Wilson," he admitted, shrugging great shoulders. "Oh, really, I suppose, since I like to think of myself as progressive. But somehow I've never been able to rid myself of the impression that this space line is a sort of stunt."

"Naturally, a space line is unusual, sir," Chris confessed, "but it has been established now for five years, and is doing reasonably well."

"Reasonably well, eh?" Emerson grinned. "In my language that means it's dying on its feet. Anyway, go on."

"We've quite a lot of trading going on in lunar ore, therefore we are

operating a space-machine freight service between here and the moon."

"That," Emerson said, "is what I find interesting. Lunar ore. I'm here to discuss lunatic ones. Ever hear of 'em?"

"Stunters." Chris sat back and reflected. "Why, yes, I think I have. Aren't they ore just below the moon's rock panicle surface? Extremely valuable?"

"To the extent of £3,000 an ounce," Emerson said. "I'll let you into a secret, Mr. Wilson. They can be used by my chemistry organizations as the basis of a new plastic I'm bringing out."

Chris nodded but said nothing. Emerson gestured vaguely with his cigar.

"My engineers on Luna have been making tests; that's how I know about lunatic. I've just bought a £3,000,000 concession on Luna through the International Convention."

"And so?" Chris asked quietly.

"I want your space line to handle a full freight shipment of lunatic ore as soon as possible. What can you do for me?"

"Anything you want," Chris answered, smiling. "Let me have the usual details and I'll fix it up to have an empty freighter loaded to capacity and sent here immediately."

"You can assure me that nothing will go wrong?" That was a vital val-

uable cargo will not get lost—or be stolen?"

Chris laughed. "Of course I can assure you, sir! We've never lost a ship since the line started. And anyway you know the line is safe since your own engineers have travelled safely to Luna."

Emerson nodded. "That satisfies me. I'll attend to the rest of the details. . . And while I'm about it I'd like to congratulate you—or rather the company you represent—upon turning a former nuisance into something at least worthwhile."

"You mean the V-16 menace of five years ago?" Chris nodded soberly.

"Yes, it could have wrecked the world—in fact would have in the hands of Carl Mueller—but thanks to Miss Brant we averted that and turned V-16 to its normal use, that of space travel. Later we intend to institute a regular passenger service to the planets. That, however, is ahead of us. Have to build up slowly, you know."

"A remarkable woman, this Miss Brant," Emerson said. "Or should I call her the Golden Amazon?" he asked, grinning.

Chris laughed. "She's our chief scientist, of course, and where we'd be without her brilliance I just don't know."

"Maybe I'll meet her some time. I'd like that. Well—" Emerson got to his feet and held out his hand. "Thank you, Mr. Wilson, and you'll be hearing from my organization. Good-morning."

The moment the door was closed Chris raced across to the telephone and watched it quip, pressed the appropriate button quickly.

"Bath!" he asked, and her face appeared on the tiny scanning plate

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Please save this section and send it to your nearest Active Service magazine depot for distribution to those still in the services.

round with the others as a white-skinned girl came hurrying in.

"That's your partner, Miss Bland, but what did you expect you asked me to do?"

"Well," Vi asked quickly.

"I think there's a lot of movement

in the middle. Maybe you'd expect

Vi uttered some more excuses and

hurred away to the laboratory. The

other friends were gathering and

shifting position about the

Vi watched the needs for several

minutes then said it was getting

began calculating when it came

The result of her figuring brought

back to her and she hurried

back into the controlling office.

"Mother's on his way to Venus?"

the announced in triumph. "The movement

of the compass needle is too swift to

be attributable to the moon's own gravita-

tion—and Mother upon it—through

and getting farther with every second."

"This is serious," the Venusian pro-

ject has to be launched!" Ruth Dodd

said.

Vi nodded. "I'll get to work on the

details and we'll discuss them here this

evening. In the meantime, Mr. Bland-

er, please come down to deal with the

Yard—and ask Mr. Hartley to have an

eye kept on things here during our

absence, please."

THAT evening, at Vi's request, Chris,

his wife, and Ruth Dodd went to

her laboratory for the conference she

had arranged.

"It was odder when they arrived

and they found her surrounded by

machines, and voluminous notes. Mr. Bland-

er, under the red-light glows trained on

her desk the glasses, up, as the wife

prettened, nodded, and motioned to

chairs. Accompanied to her off-hand way of

being kind, they discussed the matter.

At last she turned around to face them

and tossed her style pen on one side.

"I'll be glad to answer our journey

to the moon," she said.

Chris gave a grin while, "I don't see

how it could ever be so fast. It's Vi!

It nearly killed the lot of us last time.

But you are 10 times stronger

than we are."

"And on that occasion we had to race

against time," Vi pointed out. "This

time that won't be necessary. But it

will be much rougher on the machine.

It is only about 240,000 miles. To Venus

the distance, at present, is 43,000,000

miles. The distance between 25,000,000

and 130,000,000. And we can't wait for

Venus's closest approach. Because of ac-

cidents, our top speed is limited to

about 800,000 miles a week, at which

rate it will take us two and a half

years to reach Venus. There was

sterned silence. Then she

said:

"Do you mean to say it's going to

take that long for Mother's machine to

get to Venus, too? Will it take that

long for Ethel to be taken there? She's

going to be nearly grown up before

the comes back, at that rate?"

"It will take more than a normal,

tolerable speed," Vi said, "because the

human frame cannot stand any greater

strain than that. We found it was a

big strain moving at four times the

speed of speed to the moon—40,000 miles

a week, which is half a million miles

a week."

"Never mind the figures!" Ruth pro-

tested. "What do you care? Does it mean

we can't go?"

"We can do as right—and we can

reach it at an enhanced speed of 1,000,000

miles a week. But I've planned to

land emphatically on the dust top. At

that speed will reach Venus in about

five years. That's what I want. I have

plans to do it. It means that we—or

pretend to understand the first thing

said about artificial gravity. How long

will it take you to rig up the necessary de-

vice?"

"No more than two days and nights,

I can use the Ultra. She's in

pretty good shape. Since I rescued her

from the moon when we seemed up ac-

tivities there, I've had some of the best

engineers to help me. But there are

other things yet to be fixed. Getting

the Ultra to work is the main thing. I

know, though it will be. It's the

project when we get there."

"Can't be worse than the strain moon-

ing?" Ruth asked, and continued, "We

survived that."

Vi hurried to her notes and studied

them for a moment. "The strain was

terrible. For one thing it is 30,000,000

miles nearer to the sun than we are

and it has a day five weeks long, and

a night of similar length. Most of the

heat of that terrible sun will be mounted

by the cloud banks of the planet, and

because of those clouds and the absence

of moon the nights will be intolerably

black. But the heat—the light which we

know exist from what Vannover told

me, I think I am trying to do. It may

perhaps, the heavy covering at

atmosphere. I tell you frankly it will

be a pretty big job."

"How about its gravity?" Chris asked.

"Venus is only about 800 miles less in

diameter than the earth so we'll have

enough gravity. The point I am trying to

make is that it is a world only the

strongest should visit. I'm wondering

if I might go alone."

"Mother got there and dominated her,

self, didn't she?" Ruth Dodd pointed

out. "Then not what one would call

being like the glass, up, as the wife

prettened, nodded, and motioned to

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"We can do as right—and we can

reach it at an enhanced speed of 1,000,000

miles a week. But I've planned to

taken over tomorrow morning, so as far

as I'm concerned, I'm free."

"Good!" Vi said. "Then there's nothing

to worry about. I'll be right away."

"We're nothing for which to delay and

every moment is precious. Go ahead

while I have a few instructions to give

you. I'll be right away and change into my flying

suit."

The two nodded and turned slowly

towards the hangar, studying the shini-

ng bulk of the Ultra as they approached

it.

"Given you a queer feeling," Beatrice

said, hanging on to Chris arm, "to try

while I'm here, these are our last few

minutes of our normal life. How do you

know what will happen before we

leave? If we come back, I—I sort of

felt like the same way when we made

that trip to the moon."

Chris smiled and patted her hand

and the nervous and making a brave

show at dispelling the fact. Quickly

they entered the open hatch and looked

down at the controls, control—and living-

room. They settled themselves on

the cushions stretched to the curved pad-

ding of the electric chromometer

on the control panel exactly as they

had. By the time it reached 8.30 Vi arrived.

She entered in her close fitting black fly-

ing suit, and she said, "I'm sorry to

be late. It was impossible to tell that

the hat had no rest for 40 hours."

"Everything in order," she announced,

turning to the Ultra. "The machine is

in the shape look back there, ready for

use. The moment we reach Venus. In

the journey, I'm sure it's enough

every us by atomic energy for 200,000

miles, no allowing for detours and ac-

cidents. I'm sure it's enough every us

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"Yes," Ruth said, "I think that's a fine idea."

"Good! Well, half this planet, as near as I can make out, is rock, mud and mountains—and the other half jungle. Across the equator runs Highway range, reaching 12 miles into the clouds. I don't know what tumults rage at those heights, but down here the air is usually calm, fairly hot by day and warm and wet by night. What oceans there are, and I believe you fringes this jungle somewhere, are supposed to be the volcanic sediment. No I heard one of the city guards remark. What I was thinking was the mud regions are open to development. In time, engineers could quell and bridge the mud flats. Only the jungle would remain."

CHAPTER XIII

RUTH said, "Can't it be gradually broken down?"

"I'm afraid not, Miss Dodd." Kerrigan said. "As fast as it is destroyed by fire, it grows again, the mud and gravel, it grows and seeds and grows again. It literally lives. I often wonder if I think what happens if some of these stranger stones were transplanted to the earth. They'd leave everything and everything to plants. No power would be able to stop them. Even fire and acids would do it, for the roots remain underground to sprout and live again."

"... So I'm afraid the jungle will have to stay."

"Good heavens, what's that?" Ruth interrupted him suddenly. He staved. So sharp was her tone Chris, Bee and Vi moved to follow the line of her vision.

They saw immediately what she meant. What appeared to be a vast side of liquid mud glass was pouring soundlessly towards them.

"Turn your faces to the ground!" Kerrigan shouted, setting the example. "Quickly!"

But they did not comprehend immediately—then she cried out in panic as a silencing shadow came down upon her from amid the trees and vegetation. For a second or two she saw a glimpse of a glimmering sailing high in a sky of sunset ultramarine blue—then darkness. The floor of mud glass began to rise and press it into the ground, starting in a sea of flowing pink and green. As the mud glass rose, Kerrigan touched her shoulder and she dared to open her eyes again, she saw the usual gray-white daylight had returned.

"All right!" Kerrigan asked her anxiously, and she nodded.

"The—sun, of course?" she asked.

"Yes. At times the clouds break like a curtain and the sun shines down. We're twice as close to it as at home, remember, and it can play havoc with unshielded eyes. Nature certainly knew what she was about when she gave Venus a dense cloud blanket as protection."

"What a sun!" Ruth whispered.

"Worse than when seen from space. As horrible as everything else on this mad world."

Kerrigan looked at her seriously and nodded.

"We can overcome that trouble when volcanists come, Miss Dodd. They will all be warned to carry smoked glass for solar observation."

Ruth gave a slow smile. "I think we ought to dispose with that smoked glass. On this untamed world it is not so much a case of you being a commander and myself a lieutenant of the Space Line. We are reduced to primitive means. Do you not think? We've lost a man and a woman with all the social trimmings discarded."

"Yes, I suppose you're right," he agreed. "Fussy, really, how circumstances level everything, isn't it?"

His first name's Howell, by the way—Herrington. I think the name's right. He stopped and glanced across the clearing as Vi scrambled suddenly to her feet with her many-purposers in her hand. What had become apparent to her sharp ears reached the others a second or two later. It was the noise of smothering undergrowth and the cracking of branches. Immediately everybody was standing up, hands held behind their eyes.

Into the clearing burst four men, travel-stained and dirty. The foremost man was immediately recognized as Carl-Mutler, his immaculate tan usual, black hair showing under his up-thrust ear behind, eyes heavily gray, his complexion uniformly drab from

years' spent in laboratories inhaling poisonous fumes.

It was Mutler who spoke first—unhurried, smooth as ever.

"We can either all shoot at each other and achieve greater nothing, or we can put our guns away and behave like reasonable people."

Still the impulse went on, then Vi made a signal.

"We'll put our guns away, Mutler," she said, slipping her back to her belt, then she and the others glared at her in her surprise she added quickly, "Even if we wipe that from their faces we have still others to face. And we may get wounded. We can't risk it as long as Ethel is in a hospital."

Kerrigan and Chris were the least willing, but even they finally followed. Vi example. Mutler nodded in satisfaction and withdrew to his three lounges in the background. They like he, bolstered their guns.

Well, the scientist said, coming forward. "I'm glad I caught up with you, commander." I was rather afraid you'd get away before I could manage it."

"But for deciding to cast in my lot with this party here I would have," Kerrigan remarked.

"Hoping to achieve what?" Mutler asked, coldly smiling—then raising his eyes momentarily he turned to Vi. "Been quite a long time since we last met, hasn't it, Miss Brant?" Last time it was Long before the Space Line was born, wasn't it? I congratulate you on surviving this far. I really thought I'd finished you off when I fired you to earth in that V-10 I should have known better. However, now you are here—just as I expected you would be sooner or later—maybe I can convert the mistake."

"You expected us to come?" Chris repeated. "How so?"

I know, Mr. Wilson, that you and Mr. Wilson would come after your daughter—and I know too that you, Miss Brant, would not be likely to stay out of an intriguing game if you thought you had a chance of getting at me. So you see I relied on human nature and probability to come here. That you, too, decided to come, Miss Dodd, makes this scene completely feel a bit less weird, doesn't it? Much better here than on earth, where, unfortunately, my activities would be a little cramped."

MUTLER stood smiling and watching the effect of his words, then with a backward and upward movement of his right hand he had his gun levelled again.

"Quarry them?" he ordered, jerking his head in the direction of the newcomers.

"Why, you dirty no account scum. Fil—"

Chris' outburst was interrupted by Mutler saying:

"You'll not do anything if you know what's good for you, Mr. Wilson. You have a daughter in my hands, remember—"

"All right," he added, when every one had been given a good look at the underground. It's the safest place."

The fly lightened bitterly as she saw her many-purposers weapon thrown into the vegetation.

"You were telling us," Ruth stated deliberately, "that the abduction of Ethel was really nothing more than a trick to get us up here."

"Ah, yes! I knew you would not agree to transfer the Space Line to me, so I had to find a reason for taking Ethel—so I had that letter given to you, Mr. Wilson. However, this is an open place, and I'm sure you'll be much more comfortable at my headquarters. If you will come this way."

The fly hesitated. Mutler raised an eyebrow.

"I might have to remind you about Ethel."

"I'll have his orders," Vi said briefly as the others looked at her. "He's got all the men at the moment."

Since she was the only one walking forward, the others had no alternative but to do the same. Ahead of the party went Mutler, his herculean men, their disintegrator-weapons blinding away the all-consuming jungle.

With rests for refreshment and brief sleep, the party continued the journey for nearly 40 hours. Then at last the jungle began to thin, the bushes and they came to a bare and rocky plain flanked in the far distance by low, rounded hills. The creature crowd reaching down nearly to its heels.

They halted and waited for the others to catch up with him.



There it is," he said, pointing. "My city. Quite extensive, isn't it?"

Kerrigan, already acquainted with it, passed no comment, but the others gazed across the bare, thin-walled buildings composed entirely of heavy blocks of stone. The archaic texture was somehow natural, suggestive of long dead fossils—of cities on earth which have been discovered from time to time. There were streets dividing the rows of buildings and here and there a black dome towered. The whole place gave a conflicting impression of both ruin and beauty.

The survey finished, Mutler led the way again and in another hour they reached the first buildings. He led the way inside one of these, along a gaunt, delightfully cool passage, and finally into an enormous room. The surprising thing was that three huge fans, electrically driven, were swinging around lazily in the gleamed stone ceiling, and there was also a generous assortment of quite normal looking furniture.

There were cushions, armchairs, rugs, carpets, credenzas, tables—ruff-like tables—black lowered over the big, gleamed stone floor, and a great wide lowing from jungle and mountain.

"As you will observe," Mutler remarked, smiling, "this is a very comfortable place. I have been quite busy in the past few years. Little by little my earth agents managed to secure to me in the shape of machine tools. However, this is my own room for general purposes. While I have a maid prepared for us we can all wash and change. I have everything arranged, even to clothes. And rooms are ready for you. That is, Miss Dodd, if you will share with Miss Brant just for the moment. I will remedy the matter later. You, commander, had better use my dressing room for the moment. I trust you will manage to find it quite similar to what you are wearing now. New name?"

After turning to the panel covered with buttons and giving his party for a moment, he motioned to a door. The party followed.

Beyond it was a long corridor down which Mutler strode, pausing finally at a door. He opened it and they came to a wide, well-furnished room, very much like a lounge in a modern hotel. The name was "Venus."

"From here," Mutler explained, nodding to doors, "lead bedrooms. One for you, Mr. and Mrs. Wilson, and one for you, Miss Brant and Miss Dodd. You will find everything you need within easy reach. I am sure you will be comfortable. We will meet again in the main room in half an hour."

CHAPTER XIII

WHEN the party returned they found the maid had out. There were three bedrooms, very comfortable and well-furnished—an excellent one for the ladies. He was a tall, muscular man, in spite of his dark, "Doctor, what about Ethel?" Beatrice demanded, looking at the man. "Can't you see her? Where is she?"

Mutler smiled. "You can see her with pleasure. It's in the main room. Look for yourself."

Getting up he went over to the control

panel and pressed another of the buttons. On the opposite wall above the table a small television screen flashed into being. In it, at the first glance, it was a view of Ethel seated beside a barred window of a hospital ward. At last she got up from her chair and began to wander listlessly about a small though well furnished bed-and-living-room.

"Quite healthy, you observe," Mutler remarked, switching off the picture and coming back to the table. "But of course she is under treatment."

"I don't quite see how she survived the trip through space," Vi remarked. "Dementia never killed me, and I even I was under terrific strain. I cannot understand how a child of eight survived so complete."

"I gave strict orders for her to be imprisoned in the ship's hold," Mutler answered. "They thought pretty dark, is lead lined and no cosmic rays could get to her. All she suffered was slight eye irritation when brought forth into the daylight again, but I soon remedied that. She's in excellent health now. Knowing her value, I simply couldn't allow anything to happen to her."

"Suppose," Vi said, "we put an end to this cat-and-mouse business? We're here, we've had a lot of trouble, and we're wise you out—of we can, and your ship is in a flash as. So let's get down to facts."

Mutler smiled. "I'm sure there is no hurry, Miss Brant. Besides, I like to be certain first. Now let me serve you some food!"

Mutler provided each of them with some helpings, and commented that they were wondering how I manage to have so good a service here? It's partly because I had a lot of material smuggled from the earth and partly because of natural resources. When I scoured from the moon before you named V-10 at it had to find a new habitation—and that couldn't be the earth because everybody was waiting to see me. I got it, I got it to the moon and hiding ourselves in its caves, we waited for the day when we could contact with our agents on earth. So our plans grew. Vital machine tools were smuggled to us on Lunar transport. Space Line, Miss Dodd—and those tools were then taken to Venus here.

Mutler ate for a while and considered, then said, "We spent six weeks in space, changing our vessel so we could have artificial gravity and therefore stable equilibrium, and we came here—on to this planet, apparently. May I be permitted to suggest that you try to get it to rights. Then, by secretly returning to the moon and hiding ourselves in its caves, we can wait for the day when we can contact with our agents on earth. So our plans grew. Vital machine tools were smuggled to us on Lunar transport. Space Line, Miss Dodd—and those tools were then taken to Venus here."

and the other between door and frame so that it rested on the shaft of the lock itself. Then, springing out wire as she went, she walked backwards into her bedroom.

"Everything checks up," she said, emerging again. "I've been managed to get the door open for the lock, too. They go right back to the main cable in the dismantled light unit. When I close the switch on my bedroom wall the current will try to leap the gap from positive to negative in other words from cable to lamp. The lamp being a copper like the door, will carry the current, and unless I've very much miscalculated, will be damaged by the surge of energy. At the same time that surge of energy will become electrified should anybody start to investigate."

"How much noise will it make?" she asked.

"Scarcely any beyond a rattling. That's why I'm doing it. But for the most attracting attention I could have about the guard who brings out my meals, or those ladies who hover near the window over there. Now to something else."

She climbed up on the table in the middle of the room and reached up to the ceiling-concealing door. She pulled the bolt of her gun, she smashed through the slender armor and put the unit out of commission. Almost immediately she began to take a faint shiver round the edge of the drawn shade at the window.

"Breaker screen, oh?" Chris asked.

"It all helps," Vi said. "There is also the possibility that destroying this unit will have destroyed the main cable throughout the building. If an mist will occur rapidly, which is just what we want."

"Isn't it also possible then that when you throw the switch for this current you'll short-circuit all the lights as well?" Kerrigan queried.

"Highly possible. In fact that's what I'm hoping for—but in the split second before that happens the lock will be untripped. We'll have noise enough by this light up there what we've done—whether all lights have gone, I mean. If it doesn't go out, I'll smash it to the ground. It will be highly dangerous. Just let me handle it."

Chris looked and looked at each one seriously in turn.

"I want it to be clearly understood what we are doing," she said. "Once I have thrown the switch, I shall not be able to stop it. If the scheme fails it may cost all of us our lives. If it succeeds we don't know until we see the white cloth of Dover. You understand that all of you?"

They nodded, silent and earnest. "Once more draw that mist over the door," he said, holding on to her hand. Vi looked down at her with a faint smile.

"Whatever happens, keep checks, you stick close to your post. You are instructed—'We're going to do a lot of rushing about, see?'"

"Yes, Austin V. Will it be alright?"

"Very probably." Vi agreed drily. Then she took her gun out of her belt and strode to the bedroom door. "Go get ready."

She reached inside the doorway of the room and pressed the switch. A blinding blue flash from the doorway, forcing all of them to jerk their eyes away. A steady flood of smoke rose, puffing from Vi waited, her jaw set. She glanced at the ceiling where light still glowed faintly thickening mist.

"Evidently not a series circuit," Kerrigan said. "Each unit must be wired independently."

He strode towards the door but Vi whirled his back.

"Must leave the door to me," she said. "Remember that the swing back to it as there was a gaping hole of sunlight and the back of heavy feet on the floor."

"The guard," Vi said. "He's got what you've named him to do. Go on."

From her chest pocket she took a length of thickly rubbered cable—presumably from the light socket—and looped it through the door handle carefully. Then she pulled sharply. The door came slightly inward and then swung again as the cable was pulled. The door still hung electrified to it.

"Why not switch the current off?" Chris asked, glancing back towards the bedroom.

Vi shook her head. "Too dangerous. It might short-circuit with a short circuit and kill me. Only one way—"

She gave the door a mighty heave and it came inward, with the guard clanking the handle with claw-like fingers. Then avoiding him and the door

by several inches each one of them crept out into the corridor. "Only that," he said, "and evidently." Vi said, glancing down. "And since we should have had any noise no more."

"The corridor was misty. Evidently the failure of the plug-dimmers had not been noticed yet."

"Where do we get hold of Dr. Zeissman?" Vi murmured. Drawing "Seems to me we've got to find a single guard in the room and ask him. That's outside. Come on."

Gently making no sound, they reached towards the main doorway, then they passed suddenly to the corridor. At the corridor opened and a guard emerged. There was no time to conceal them.

Vi streaked down the corridor, driving up her right fist as she went. The guard took the blow on the jaw just as he drew his gun, and he lurched back against the wall, his weapon clattering from his hand. Vi stepped forward, followed and picked it up as Vi covered the man with the gun she had secured.

"Where do we find Dr. Zeissman?" she demanded. "And if he's not here?"

The man looked uncertain, then as Vi jabbed the gun in his ribs he nodded down to the corridor.

"In his laboratory—first turn on the right. First door."

"Go ahead," Vi ordered. "And don't make the mistake of trying to stop a warning."

He obeyed and walked forward down the deserted corridor. He shot an angry glance inward at the room the man had vacated and the door closed behind him in the slow thickening mist beyond; then he turned right at the first corner to the corridor.

Vi nodded and tested it gently. It opened easily at his touch.

"Good," she said, nodding. "This is to be expected."

Her knee bumped up suddenly into the man's stomach. He gasped and doubled up, then fell his head against the door, his hand on the door handle.

"Should keep him quiet," Vi said. "He's not to be disturbed. He's face serious."

"Now for Zeissman."

THE ladies followed her into a laboratory-observatory. She nodded to Chris to look the door behind them, then she turned to the right, her hand on the door handle, as yet to the thickening mist at Zeissman, working on calculations and recording on a small screen.

He looked up at her and nodded. Her gun levelled. Vi advanced towards him.

Aloud he became aware of her. "How did you get in here?" he snapped.

"That's my business, Dr. Zeissman. I want something from you, and I usually get what I want. And don't reach for those buttons on your desk."

"What do you want? That you get me to retain the use of your hands."

The small, high-foreheaded scientist relaxed and glanced across the desk, then his eyes wandered to the group in the background.

"What happens, doctor, that the prison which can hold the Golden Amazon has not yet been made?" Vi explained, her purple eyes never leaving his. "Since you have been here, how we get you right as well as start wondering how I know you have an antidote for this."

Zeissman started violently. "But I—how did you find that?"

"Yes, sir," Zeissman set his jaw. "What of it?"

"I want a doctor—and I mean to have it. It's an electrical formula. I want the full details, and without delay."

He believed, or he would check the life out of you if their tendrils were allowed to get a firm hold. "Don't you?"

Zeissman's face grew pale, his lips quivered, and then he nodded his head.

"Come on, doctor, that formula?" Vi asked impatiently. "I can't afford to waste time."

"That's unfortunate," Zeissman commented.

Vi turned, headed her gun to Chris, and then went round the desk. She weighed the matter in her mind for a moment, then, without warning, her hands seized his. Bone-crushing pressure struck against through both his

arms as he was whirled to his feet. So far he had only heard of the Amazon's finger strength and had decided it, but now he realized the necessity of testing his veins.

There was no way of dislodging the steel hold she had upon him. He was impaled backward irresistibly, stumbling, then, given a firm shove backward, he collapsed in the middle of the stranger vision in the corner.

Immediately he was up again, but a tugging force pulled down behind him, and the plant roots. Delicate tendrils began to creep about him. As fast as he tried to get up, they pulled him down. He pulled away savagely, received a crack in the jaw which dazed him and fell down, his hands stumped, one more vine coiled the life out of you unless I get that formula."

"I'm new—Zeissman shouted and with a huge effort he tore free of the growths and hunched forward.

Vi caught his arms as he reeled toward her, forced them up his back with one of her hands clasped crosswise over his chest veins.

With the other she unfastened the buttons and secured around his wrists, bringing the end of the belt around his neck and then passing it behind his shoulders to shift his arms.

Then she kicked his feet from under him and he hit the floor with head-jarring impact. It was only a moment's work to tie his ankles with electric wire from a nearby drum. Thus trapped, the girl lifted his body and then she was alone.

Fiercely, helplessly, Zeissman squirmed and raved amidst the growths that were slowly strangling him.

Presently a cackle of voice began to wind round his neck.

"It's his choking me," he gasped out hoarsely.

"Do I get that formula?" Vi questioned. "I'll give you a hint."

The scientist nodded his head frantically, words choked back.

Vi slipped from the desk, tore the growths from his chest, and dragged the man free. She whirled him to his feet, undressed his arms, and returned the growths to his wrists. His ankles she left untethered.

"All right, where is it?" she snapped. He fumbled with the desk drawers and produced a sheet of blue blotting paper covered in electrical symbols and equations.

"This is it in formula form," he gulped. "And here is a model of it."

He nodded to the bench and tried to step towards it. Vi gave him a hand to help him down, then she saw that his sprawling heavily and the equipment flung, he struggled up on his bound feet.

"Demonstrate it," Vi ordered. "On those plants."

He turned and switched on the current. Nothing was visible on the machine but presumably some kind of radiation came from it for the small glowing forest in the corner began to quiver, ceased growing and then flaked slowly into crumbling dust.

For a moment there was no sign of returning growth.

CHAPTER XIX

SHE reached to the model and with one sweep of her arm, sent it to the floor where it splattered to bits. Zeissman stared down in dumb dismay.

"Delivered you slightly?" Vi asked him cynically. "It's a model, isn't it?"

"Nothing. What about that V-10? Did you load it with those as Mueller ordered you?"

Zeissman gazed blankly. "How do you know what he ordered me to do?"

"Answer my question: Is V-10 loaded?"

"As a matter of fact, it is."

"Why?" Vi Mueller lifted with glittering eyes.

"Mueller isn't so self-sufficient as you seem to think, Amazon." Zeissman retorted. "Do you think that we other scientists are so stupid as to let this world control?"

"I'm going to fire that V-10 to Earth—or somebody is—almost certainly. Do you see?"

"I have the honor," Mueller's Space Line project will be wiped out by these plants! He said to the master, I will, with a few others."

"It's too well guarded. If I don't fire the V-10 in there will be—"

He raised his hands at his throat slightly and forced his back against the electrical bench. He heard clatter at his feet, but he did not look farther as to the bench until he saw the electrical equipment hovering near him.

Those in the disgusting mist at the other end of the room hardly saw what happened. They beheld a flash of electricity, a great flash from Zeissman, then his body slid helplessly to the floor with a fearful hum across the hardwood.

Zeissman stood up and took her gun from Chris.

"Two thousand volts through him," he said. "Now, in our next move with that V-10."

"You must destroy it!" Chris asked. "What else?"

The mist in the room was as dense as in the open. There were no sounds, no signs of guards, save obviously that of the faint hum of the equipment.

Zeissman's laboratory. Silently Vi slid out into the stress of night and the others followed.

"Have to find the main street to get to V-10," Kerrigan said. "That should be all right."

He plunged into the mist, feeling his way along the building until the blue light of the street came into view. He emerged like a speck from the gloom. From the drift of the mist they could scarcely see him.

"Across this way," Vi said, nodding to the right. "Somewhere over here anyway—and be prepared for guards."

Heing her gun tightly she was on in front. The others, keeping in close contact with her, they went out of their way, apparently, for they found them some before the light began to show over the V-10 site came into view.

At the same moment there loomed the dim forms of the guards around the apparatus—busy outlines, talking among themselves and apparently playing out some kind of game.

"We've no time to waste on this," Vi murmured, leveling her gun. "This should take care of them."

She fired, and the guards fell, but beyond three or four shots which missed the mark nothing happened. Fiercely Vi leveled her gun at the other end of the chamber exhausted. And the men had been warned. Startled, their guns at the ready, they came rushing to the mist.

"Take one shot, Chris—Kerrigan!" Vi shouted. "The other end of the mist."

Without giving the nearest man a chance to fire his gun she charged at his legs, sweeping him over her shoulder, then turned and dealt him a knockout right-hand as he struggled to get up.

He fell, his jaw broken, and the girl found herself hurled to the ground by the second guard. His gun jabbed viciously in her back.

Instantly she twisted and the multi-shot went into the ground. Her slender body arched upwards, heaving the man away from her. Up came her right side and kicked him in the face as he dived for his gun. Gasping with pain, he rolled over, his head on the ground, his hands on his face.

She caught his right arm with her left hand and bent it back viciously. He screamed, his face as white as a sheet.

The man staggered dazedly, hardly conscious of where he was. Vi stepped forward, her hand on his forehead. He dropped, and remained still.

Chris turned and faced Chris and Kerrigan, fighting with the two remaining guards who had descended. The mood of the other two was different. They fired the gun twice. First Chris, then Kerrigan, found their attacker falling helplessly.

Vi jabbed the gun in her belt. "We've got to hurry before they come to investigate the shots."

SHE lunged through the fog in the V-10 area, her hand on the ground, and so to the war-head of the projectile. It was sealed but in the transparent fog she saw the other end of the light, where the packed masses of treated seeds. Once the rocket struck the earth it, would be the end of the seeds and the seeds would grow and grow.

"Better try to destroy the electrical apparatus," Vi said. "It's the only way to the seeds."

"That's the case."

"Hearmy, what's that?" Beatrix and Kerrigan were a little aside from the party, wandering round the projectile and looking at it. Then all of a sudden a brilliant flash, a screaming roar, a hot, blistering wind. Clouds of dust, showers of sparks and disturbed

